

Dark Adaptation

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Dark Adaptation

by [ChaoticBlades](#)

Summary

Alienated by the new laws the Guardians' have put in place following the Sinestro Corps War, Hal has left the Green Lantern Corps and joined forces with his former mentor. But while the ring on his finger is yellow, his heart and thoughts are with the Corps he left, now at the mercy of the increasingly tyrannical Guardians.

Notes

DCU Big Bang fic and as such, it has an accompanying piece of fanart by Chibifukurou on LiveJournal:

<http://chibifukurou.livejournal.com/58770.html>

When Hal awoke the next morning, it was to an empty bed, persistent ache, and sick feeling in his stomach. Once again he was struck with how hasty he'd been, how reckless, stupid-

He forced himself to calm down and, reluctantly, revisited the events that brought him to be here, in

Sinestro's bed, sporting a Qwardian ring. He had, by Ganthet's request, gone with the Blue Lanterns to save Sinestro, and that was where he found Laira. Laira, the once Green Lantern now perverted into a soldier of Atrocitus. She regained herself only to die, as the ring that replaced her heart couldn't function without her rage.

Hal didn't much remember the next part, only that when he awoke his ring was struggling with a blue one for dominance and Sinestro was gone. He found out from Saint Walker that the Sinestro Corps had rescued him amidst the confusion. It was then that the Guardians had forcibly summoned him back to Oa.

He grimaced at the memory of it. The Guardians made an example of him, unveiling more of their mystery laws. At first they merely accused him of fraternizing with another Corps, and when he argued they added that he was questioning them and the Book of Oa. It was when he compared them to Sinestro that they nearly sent him to the sciencells. Never before had Hal been so glad to have such an argumentative man as his fellow lantern.

Guy would not be happy when he learned that his hard work had gone to waste. But Hal had no choice; the Guardians were proving the old adage about absolute power right, and he needed time alone to think up a plan to stop them. Or rather he needed a hint, one that was provided by the blue ring when it left his finger. It had shown him one last image: him and Sinestro, side by side.

Well, there he was in the Sinestro Corps. If it was meant to somehow save the day, there was nothing to suggest that that hope had been well-founded. In fact, the longer he dwelled on it, the more convinced he became that his life in the Corps –once the only part of his life that had any simplicity to it- had somehow been tied in a knot. Friends, allies, foes, traitors –he couldn't keep them separate in his mind anymore. There were too many players using rules he didn't know; maybe it was just as well that being put on patrol duty would keep him far away from the conflict. Surely saving lives would help him keep things in perspective.

"It will be just like being a Green Lantern," he said aloud, as if that would convince even himself. It did nothing of the sort, though it did call attention to one problem.

His costume.

Join up with Sinestro as he had, Hal in no way agreed with his tactics. To act as a hero while decked out in the colors of his new Corps would fool anyone he tried to save, make it seem as if the Sinestro Corps were a benevolent entity.

Concentrating, he willed as much of the yellow out of the uniform as he thought he could get away with, leaving behind only the outlines of the jester-like spikes and the boots. For extra measure he ripped off the symbol on his chest and darkened his mask to black. As long as he was running with the villains, he might as well look the part.

As satisfied as he could ever be wearing the yellow, he drifted from the building that housed Sinestro's quarters into Qwardian streets. They were empty and silent in a way that was hauntingly like Coast City before its population boom. Hal unconsciously frowned and, hurrying to remove himself from the disturbing observation, rocketed off into the stars.

It was easier to think outside the oppressive atmosphere. Furthermore, his ring alerted him to a planet in peril in Sector 3510. A distraction was just what he needed until he could sort things out in his head.

“You will bend to my will, Triskians, or face a wrath like none you’ve dreamt in your darkest of dreams!”

Hal would’ve rolled his eyes had they not been occupied scanning the alleyway for signs of trouble. He’d already had one scuffle with a native trying to mug him –huge eyes and antennae gave the miscreant an advantage in the dark that Hal couldn’t match without giving himself away.

“My rage shall blot out the stars! Your blood shall flow thick into your eyes!”

“And they say my lines are bad,” he muttered to himself, peeking around a pile of crates at the cause of his uncharacteristically stealthy approach.

Namely, the army. Most generals would know better than to amass all their troops at one location, but, as he was the only one coming to the planet Trisk’s aid, it was proving to be a good move.

“Now, bow to me or suffer your city walls to be painted cobalt!” the invading general screamed, her bosom heaving from the effort to be heard across the entirety of the square she gave her address from. The Triskians, sweat pouring down their dark grey skin, hurried to do as she commanded.

Except for one, who boldly remained afoot in the first row.

The attackers looked nervously at one another, glancing every so often to see how their boss was handling it. The general –Alopo, he thought he’d heard her shout during her villainous monologue – was not taking the defiance in any way that could be considered ‘well’. What could be seen of her face under the many layers of armor she wore was turning colors Hal didn’t even have a name for.

Following some cue that he didn’t catch, the soldiers removed themselves from the area she stood, leaving her alone with the one who would resist her.

The Triskian was a woman who, from the way she held herself, Hal could tell knew how to fight. His suspicions were confirmed when she drew two curved blades with hook-shaped hilts from inside her cloak. What she said to her foe he couldn’t catch, but it infuriated the would-be conqueror, prompting an attack from an eagerly drawn swallow.

For a moment he watched the two clash, each more aggressive than the other, before it occurred to him that everyone else was paying attention too. It was the perfect distraction for a little roughing up of his own.

Clang!

Hal christened his ring with a boxing glove construct, knocking a group of soldiers into one another and sending those surrounding to the ground from the impact. Before they could recover, he swept the Triskians up and deposited them on the rooftops of the surrounding buildings. For a moment the invaders could do nothing but gape.

“Kill the one who dares try to dishonor the name of Alopo!” Alopo shouted over the sounds of her own battle. As one her troops charged.

Even as he flattened them across the battlefield, he could feel the pit of their stomachs drop and their spirits quail. They were afraid. Of him, Alopo, the brave Triskian –it didn’t matter; that he could sense it with his new ring, almost taste it, was enough to make him shudder. He really was part of the Sinestro Corps.

A lucky (desperate) swipe sliced across his chest and brought him back to reality. Most of the combatants were gone, leaving only the two women, a gaggle of devoted (frenzied) soldiers, and

himself.

“You guys don’t really think you can win, do you?” Instead of merely blocking, he knocked the weapon out of the hands of next one who attacked him. Crossing his arms, he rose a short distance into the air and yanked his assailant up with a construct so that they were face-to-face, the other’s feet dangling uselessly. “Do you have any idea what I could do to you with this? How many ways I could-“

The word “kill” hovered on his lips. Letting the one he was terrorizing drop to the ground, he surveyed the scene with a renewed sense of horror. The army hadn’t fled as he’d thought; they littered the ground in various states of wellbeing, the very best groaning in too much pain to even nurse their own injuries.

Now that he was undistracted by battle, the fear radiating from every corner threatened to overload his senses. There were Triskians quailing at the thought of another, more brutal conqueror, the ones he’d beaten down fearing for their lives, and even Alop herself was consumed by the idea that she was being shown up.

It was probably for that reason that she swung too wildly and was summarily disarmed with a scornful flourish by the Triskian warrior. Hal noticed that she was an island in the sea of dread that surrounded them. He was surprised she hadn’t been tapped for the Corps.

“This indignity *will not stand*, do you hear me, *peasant?!?*”

“No, nor will any other after today!” the other woman snapped back, preparing to plunge her blade into Alop’s breast.

Hal caught her arm just in time to prevent the execution. “Stop! You can’t just kill her-“

“Like you would refuse to?” she spat back. Still, she stepped aside and let the victory-emboldened police force escort the snarling prisoner away. “What do you want here, Lantern?”

“I’m just doing my duty,” he replied evenly, stepping around so they could speak face to face. The first thing he noticed was the red war paint etched in weaving designs where she wasn’t covered by a laced-up breastplate and loincloth-like kilt.

Tossing her short, copper hair disdainfully, she said suspiciously, “I’ve seen the Green Lantern of my sector, and you are not he.”

“Look, miss-“

“Uainel Tahwel, of the East Capitol Militia.” Narrowed plum eyes stared with more challenge than he really thought was fair, considering that he’d done most of the work to save her people.

“Uainel, I know Trisk doesn’t interact much with her neighbors-“, the ring seemed to have been set to give him crucial information about a planet as soon as he entered its atmosphere, “-but right now, the universe is heading towards all-out war. It’s not as simple as ‘the Green Lantern Corps saves the day’ anymore.”

She seemed less than impressed with his warning, demanding, “Was it ever?”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, he fought back the urge to let out a heavy gust of breath. “*Look*. I’m not a Green Lantern. I’m not even one of the ‘good guys’. It’s not just the ones with courage or high moral standards who get picked to use the greatest weapon in the universe; nowadays the exact same people it would be a Green Lantern’s job to hunt down are banding together with their own rings.”

He paused to let it sink in. Not sure whether he was missing some nonverbal cues or if she was just that stoic, he plowed on, “I’m with the Sinestro Corps and we stand for fear. We won’t stop until the universe has been brought to order with it, even if it means subjugating every sentient being by whatever means necessary.”

Giving a curt nod, Uainel pivoted into a strong stride in the direction of the planet’s equivalent of apartment complexes. Already many citizens had decided they’d had enough excitement for one day and had trundled back home, their windows dimly shining green from the activated lights.

He was flabbergasted. “Didn’t you hear anything I–” Having hurried to catch up, he nearly toppled over when she whipped around to snap out a reply.

“I have received your warning, harbinger of fear,” she said in a careful undertone, “The East Capitol Militia and any other that can be convinced shall prepare for what lies ahead.” Here her voice hardened. “As you have said, this is no simple battle. As such, I have neither use nor tolerance for one who doesn’t even know what side he has chosen. Commit to your new cause or else return to the organization you’ve extolled such praise upon.”

Had it been that obvious that he had more than ample doubts about his choice in ally? He was saved from the need to respond by her resuming her pace. As he watched her disappear into the building, a glint of gold flashed just once from the rooftop. Taking his time –after all, he’d never been in a hurry to report as a Green Lantern, and that went doubly for his new ranking officer –Hal glided up to where Sinestro hovered, arms crossed.

In his left hand, he clutched the symbol Hal hand ripped off. In hindsight, perhaps he should have waited until getting clear of Korugar before doing so. Or at least gotten clear of Sinestro’s own room.

Hal, upon reaching the edge of the roof, opened his mouth to speak –only for his ring to promptly shut off.

“Sinestro-!”

The man’s right arm shot out and caught Hal by the collar. Sinestro looked down his nose at him, not in the usual smug superiority, but absolute displeasure. He felt a flash of empathy for the soldier he’d pulled the same move with in the plaza as he was brought in closer. For a moment Sinestro merely glared, then presented the missing piece of his uniform before him.

“You are a part of my Corps now, Jordan.” The other seemed to struggle for a moment to keep his iron-clad self-control. “When you lost your way, I again gave you direction. I have given you free reign, privileges beyond any other. I have allowed you to skirt duties in which you would dirty your hands.” He swiveled and let Hal drop to the roof, the scrap of cloth landing on his breast. “I do not care if you act as if nothing has changed, but you *will* conduct yourself as one of *my* Corpsmen.”

There was no avoiding it, if he wanted to do good. “Alright, I get it already. I’ll wear it.”

Sinestro’s mood didn’t lighten completely until Hal put himself back into costume with the restored ring. “Ever the dramatic one,” he noted in amusement, noticing the change in color scheme.

“That sounded almost like banter,” Hal shot back with an eyeroll. He followed Sinestro up into the air, sparing a single glance back at the city when they had hiked high enough to see it in its entirety. The light from one window seemed to be especially bright, and he liked to imagine it was Uainel’s. For a pretty woman, she hadn’t been too pleasant, but the universe could use more like her if the whispers he’d heard of Blackest Night’s approach were true.

This time when he woke, it was to the smell of what was a brave attempt at breakfast a human would call appetizing. A bowl of rather chalky eggs and strips of some kind of fried, fatty meat sat at a small table adjacent to the bed. Sitting up, and only wincing slightly as he did so, he ate the peace offering (which was what it had to be, since it was unlikely that hands other than Sinestro's had been involved in the dish's making).

He was again alone, but his ring informed him that the rest of the Corps had yet to leave on a mission. Not an ideal situation for him to go out on a mission of his own, but he'd be damned if he let that get in the way. He strolled through the main hallways of the building with enough boldness to dissuade most from bothering him. It was when he reached the street that he encountered trouble.

With the predictability of a bad high school flick, a call of "Running away, Greenie?" came from a hulking alien of similar build and height to Kilowog with a snake-like tail instead of legs.

"Do you see me running?" Keeping his eyes trained on the figure slithering towards him, Hal watched from his peripheral vision as the other Corpsmen gave the two of them space. From the grins on their faces, they were clearly expecting their companion to beat him into a bloody smear.

With all the charm of a one-dimensional bully the alien smirked and retorted, "No, you'd have to stop limping first."

If Hal ever made it back into the Green Lantern Corps, he made the resolution to try harder at making amends with the Lost Lanterns. Clearly Earth had more in common with the rest of the universe than anyone realized if he was actually having this conversation.

He belatedly realized he'd lost the chance to make a come-back. Not that he had one in mind, given how surreal the situation was. If he wasn't scared of the Sinestro Corps before, this in no way convinced him that he should be.

By this time the harasser had made it to him and was casting his enormous shadow over him. "You must be something else in the sack, Earthtrash."

Two could play that game. "I normally don't give out tips, but you look like you could use all the help you can get."

"I'll be sure to ask if I ever need to sleep my way up," the other sneered back, laughing when Hal bristled, "Not that I will. With you in our Corps even untested rookies look powerful by comparison. The way you use fear, you should go back to your old colors! Or did you whore yourself up?"

The alien never got a chance to finish, because Hal had laid him flat on his back with a single hardy punch. Holding the construct in clear view of everyone present he asked in a deadly cool voice, "Does anyone else have something to say? I'm all ears."

They looked from the fist to their groaning fellow and seemed to decide it wasn't worth it. No, it was more; their earlier derision had given way to uneasiness about the Earthman in their presence. Hal could feel new fears surfacing, fear of the primitive savages rumored to tear their planet apart with war over the tiniest offense. Of the one called the greatest of the Green Lanterns, whose loyalties now appeared to belong solely to Sinestro. The one who once tried to destroy everything as Parallax. As one they realized who they were dealing with: one of the most notoriously unstable powerhouses of the universe.

The street gradually cleared until it was just him and one other. Already guessing who it was, he

turned to see Sinestro. The Korugarian didn't say a word, simply smiling with unmistakable pride and drifting off to gather the troops for a mission. Beating down the rookie inside him that celebrated finally having his former mentor's approval, he decided to start the day off with a patrol across Qward, breaking up cases of Sinestro Corpsmen abusing the residents with a single look. Apparently word spread fast.

So it went.

Every day he would patrol whenever the rest of the Corps seemed to least expect it, the rest of the day spent visiting other planets to aid from the shadows. Occasionally he checked on Trisk, but while Uainel appeared to be successful in rallying the fragmented militias that made up the planet's military, the woman herself was nowhere to be seen. At least there was yet to be any sign that the mobilization would see any action, unlike his trips to Earth. There it was business as usual with aliens, supervillains, and international incidents.

It got to the point he barely saw Sinestro or any other member of the Corps, even on the occasions he took a breather back on Qward. He couldn't afford to; if he was to make amends for choosing the Qwardian ring, his only recourse was to prevent as much damage as possible with it. The Sinestro Corps was mostly lying low, but when the time came that they stirred, he would be there to pick up the pieces, even if it meant not sleeping that night.

After all, what else could he do? Twice now he had abandoned his real ring.

Hal blinked groggily. He could've sworn that just seconds ago he was fighting a group of particularly tenacious smugglers... or was it a serial killer? In fact, he seemed to remember landing in one of the backstreets of Qward's capitol that he used to take quick naps in when he didn't want to deal with Sinestro questioning him.

Now, however, he stared at soothing, cream-colored walls and dimly noted Korugarians in tight, white, full-body garments fiddling with syringes and complex machinery. A small groan caught their attention and uncontrollable thrashing against his restraints kept it.

“-administer the dosage-“

“Someone send word to Sinestro-“

The voices faded in and out of focus as Hal was assaulted by waves of intense fever. What words he did catch were like a broken record, repeating themselves endlessly in his mind.

“-hybrid-“

“-from Earth, and our own-“

“-send word to-“

“Jordan.”

“-decrease temperature-“

“-hybridization-“

“Jordan.”

“-called meningitis from Earth, and our-“

“Hal.”

He vomited and passed out.

When he later came to, he was lucid enough to notice that the lights were down as low as possible while still giving the doctors light to see. Vaguely recalling having an upset over the bright hospital lights, he shuddered from lingering chills and sat up. Someone had removed his restraints, and with the man sitting patiently at his side, it could only have been Sinestro.

“So, I’m guessing I’ll have to throw a few more punches after this,” he croaked, accepting a glass of water.

“This facility is a secret. My Corps believes you to still be gallivanting about the galaxy playing white knight,” Sinestro corrected. His voice became graver, “Had you been hospitalized on Earth, you would have died.”

Hal said nothing, sipping and trying not to show how hard it was to sit upright.

“One of your terrestrial diseases hybridized with a common Korugarian ailment called agakurik, making it difficult for even our best physicians to isolate a cure.”

“But you did,” he pointed out. He could feel the other shoe hovering, ready to drop.

“It was improvisation at best,” Sinestro growled, giving him a stern look, “As such, you are on three days’ bed rest.” He glared to make it clear that it was not disputable.

It was a joy to shatter his expectations with a breathy laugh and cheerful acceptance of the order. As much as Sinestro harped on Earth’s medical capabilities, he apparently didn’t realize how much bed rest would usually be prescribed after nearly dying of a fatal illness. The visit lasted but a short while more, and then Sinestro deemed it time that Hal got some rest. Being weak as a kitten and still feeling a little sickly, he was in no position to argue.

The next two days passed similarly, Sinestro showing his face when he could and dashing off almost as quickly to avoid arousing suspicion. The doctors and nurses charged with Hal’s care often looked at him as if not quite sure what to make of the human in their midst. A few even recognized him as the one who had exposed Sinestro as a tyrant and gave him hopeful glances from time to time. He figured they thought he was there as a double-agent.

On the final day one of his nurses started showing symptoms of the hybrid disease (now referred to as “meningitis agakurik”). Deciding Hal could fend for himself for a time, the rest of the practitioners relocated the nurse to another room and got to work. Had they not, he might have avoided a great deal of trouble later.

He was lying facing the ceiling in boredom when a figure in the white doctor garb came in to check his condition.

Waving them off without even looking up, he called, “I’m fine, it’s Byaak you should be worried about.”

The figure froze. “Hal?”

He himself had a similar reaction. He knew that voice.

Sure enough, looking up revealed his visitor to be none other than Soranik Natu. She was even more surprised to see him, judging by her expression.

Recovering, she hurried to his bedside and murmured, “I don’t understand. What are you doing here?”

“Forget me!” he hissed, “Do you know what will happen if you get caught? What are you doing here, Soranik?”

In a quick, hushed tone she explained, “I was investigating rumors about a white sheep in the Sinestro Corps, so I snuck into Qward. I overheard a nurse mention how the lengths Sinestro was going to keep this room secret from his own Corps and... I found you.”

He’d known that eventually there would have to be some kind of confrontation with the Green Lantern Corps, but on his sickbed –and with Soranik Natu –was not what he’d envisioned. If there was anyone who would misunderstand, it was her.

“How were you captured? Why have you not escaped yet?” she prompted. Before he could answer she admonished herself, saying, “Wait and you can tell everyone at once.” She lifted him out of bed with her ring –and dropped him back down when she saw the uniform he wore. Her eyes instantly hardened.

“Soranik, let me explain-“

“Explain what?” she snapped, snatching up the hand his new ring was on, “Explain why you have betrayed the Corps for *him*?”

“I would never betray the Corps!” he half-yelled back, jerking his hand out of her grasp.

“Then what do you call this?” Soranik’s glare never left his eyes but he could tell she was referring to his ring. With the way she glowered, for a moment it was almost as if Sinestro were the one angry with him.

For once in his life, Hal knew that he needed to choose his words very carefully, or else she might misinterpret his reasons for what he was doing. That was why he breathed deeply to regain control before answering. “The Green Lantern Corps has been part of my life so long, I don’t know what I’d do if I couldn’t be in it anymore. I would never betray the Corps,” he repeated more calmly, much to her surprise. For some reason she seemed no less on edge than before, so he continued, “The Corps is everything I’ve ever believed in.”

“If you believe in it so much, then why do you wear a Qwardian ring?” If anything she was tenser than when she first saw the ring. In fact, he could sense fear growing within her at each passing moment.

“I’m not the one who’s betrayed the Corps. The Guardians have,” he said softly. He placed a hand on her shoulder to calm her.

Visibly jumping, Soranik stared in dumbfounded apprehension. Under his hand he could feel her muscles tighten up like she was preparing for a fight. He would have to try harder to get through to her.

“Look at what they’re doing, Soranik –the laws, the Alpha Corps, everything! I spoke out against them and they tried to lock me away!” He leaned in somewhat to better convey his earnestness. “I can see where this is headed, Soranik, and I can’t be a Green Lantern right now. If there were a way to fix things-“

She drew back sharply, knocking his arm roughly off of her. “The whole universe knows what happens when Hal Jordan wants to fix things.”

“Please, you have to listen to me! The Guardians aren’t a power anymore, so they’re setting themselves up like tyrants to try and regain that!” Automatically softening his voice in response to her unease –something that had become habit during the weeks he’d spent on all ends of the universe –and reaching for her again, he was shocked when he was still met with rejection. “I know the Sinestro Corps is made up of the very worst the universe has to offer, that’s why I’ve been trying to right wrongs with this ring.”

That grabbed her attention. “You were the one she meant?” Soranik asked incredulously. In an instant though, she regained her hostility. “It doesn’t matter; how could it when her prediction came true?”

“Who- what prediction?”

“The way you denounce the Guardians and try to justify your actions-“ She narrowed her eyes in disgust. “-you sound exactly like Sinestro.”

Hal watched her slip back out the way she came, sinking back onto the bed. That was how Sinestro found him, hours later, when he failed to find the physicians he’d brought in. When asked who was responsible for their rescue, Hal denied any knowledge of it and claimed to have been asleep. It was, after all, the least he could do for a former teammate.

The warning he’d given to Uainel sprang to the forefront of his mind. No, it certainly wasn’t that simple anymore at all. If only it were, he might not feel, for the first time, like he was the villain.

At Sinestro’s insistence Hal moved back to his quarters in the event that the mystery intruder came back. Hal doubted she would –if she did, it would likely be with an army of Green Lanterns at her back –but, since for all Sinestro’s bluster Hal could sense he was deeply worried, he agreed.

Final day of bed rest complete, he stepped outside the next morning to find it was one of those days when much of the Corps was out and about in the positive matter universe. That suited him just fine –it meant he wouldn’t have to play up the intimidation factor as much. Now all he would have to do was find a way to occupy his time that wouldn’t visibly defy the doctors’ orders to take things at an easier pace.

The universe provided, as when he turned a corner, there stood Kyle Rayner.

“I guess Soranik told you.” It was a stupid thing to say, since that could be only reason for Kyle to be there, but he had to break the silence as the other took in his altered appearance.

“Yeah,” Kyle agreed lamely. Hal couldn’t blame him; what can you say when confronting a former ally turned villain for the second time? “Hal, there’s a price on your head. The Lost Lanterns are calling for blood and a lot of GLs agree with them! What’s going on?”

“It’s like I told Soranik, I can’t be a Green Lantern anymore.”

Kyle frowned in disagreement. “Why not? Uainel told us the things you did and said on Trisk. You still *act* like a Green Lantern.”

“You met Uainel? Wait, she’s the one Soranik meant?” Which had to mean....

“Yeah, she’s a rookie GL now. Came with news of the Sinestro Corps’ white sheep.”

“I knew she had it in her.”

Back to awkward silence. Unlike Soranik, Kyle had known before transporting to Qward what was going on. Aside from a twinge of nervousness, Hal couldn’t read him. It surprised him to realize how much he’d begun to rely on the Qwardian ring’s ability to sense fear. Maybe she was right; he was becoming more like Sinestro.

For all that his increasing comfort with the ring’s abilities didn’t sit well with him, Hal couldn’t deny the benefits as he sensed another ring approaching. “Look, Kyle, you need to go.”

“You’re actually going to stay with the Sinestro Corps?!” The whisper-shout caught the Corpsman’s ears, and glancing over his shoulder Hal could see yellow light reflecting off the road.

“Go!” Just in time for the alien to witness it, he pushed Kyle into a wall with a yellow hand, intentionally letting the countering strike break it apart. As he had assumed, the alien sent out a general alert. It wouldn’t be long before the area was swarming with those who had remained behind. He had to act fast.

Fortunately, Kyle was on the same page. They exchanged a few blows, zipping around each other higher and higher till they were at a distance from the malicious figures below. There Hal let himself be knocked back just long enough for Kyle to shift himself back into the positive matter universe.

Drifting down to meet the others halfway, he caught one of them snarling what they would do when they caught Kyle. “We can’t risk following,” he interjected just as it reached a gory crescendo in its plan, “It’s too early to early to show our hand. We wait for Sinestro’s orders.” Or rather they wait and he ignore them, whatever they may be.

“And let the Green Lantern spy escape? He must be found and shredded until not even a synapse remains that could be used against us!” It bared serrated fangs in demonstration, the image forming courtesy of its ring.

“What could he possibly have found out?” Hal scoffed, “I know everything the Green Lantern Corps knows about Qward. Hell, I’ve led the charge a few times myself.”

“But- but the gall he has- the indignity we’ve suffered-!” it sputtered. The images produced by its ring went from gruesome to downright nauseating.

“I’m not the one who’s going to explain things to Sinestro if you all charge straight into what’s obviously a trap. No one’s leaving to chase down the Green Lantern, humiliation or not,” he said firmly. The direct order worked, though the Corpsmen weren’t happy about it. From the vicious glare he received from the ringleader, he’d made a new enemy. The way things worked in the Sinestro Corps that might as well count as rising in rank.

Having established himself as the one in charge, it was up to him to explain what had happened. A discussion he most certainly did not want to have in public. Sending a message to Sinestro’s ring, Hal returned to their room to wait. ‘Green Lantern infiltration’ must have ranked higher on his priority list than whatever it was that he was doing, for Sinestro showed up soon after, closing the door after himself to block out the sound of Mongul ordering the returning members of the Corps about.

Hal related a modified version of events. When he was done, Sinestro said nothing, merely giving him that look that said he was in trouble. He stared back as boldly as ever, daring Sinestro to

contradict his story.

Sinestro, as always, dared. “The alley rat happily jeopardized the invasion plans of his Corps on the chance that Hal Jordan would become a part of it. And you, joining him in Earthmen’s sentimentality, cleared a path for his escape.”

“I didn’t–“

“All these years, and you still take me for a fool, Jordan? Ring,” he barked, “playback.”

“Forget me! Do you know what will happen if you get caught? What are you doing here, Soranik?”

Hal felt the blood drain from his face as he listened to their entire conversation. Heard himself lie about Soranik. Heard Kyle try to talk him down. Heard the words spoken soon after getting the ring, insisting that he’d cut connections with the Green Lantern Corps. Even the warning he gave to Uainel rang out clearly from his ring.

“I’m not a traitor.” When that failed to impress Sinestro, he removed the ring and let his civvies slide into place for the first time in weeks. “I’m *not* a traitor,” he repeated, tossing the ring to the frowning Korugarian.

“As long as your loyalties are conflicted, you might as well be. Lantern Tahwel is not the only one who has no tolerance for indecision.” Holding out his hand until Hal joined it with his own, Sinestro reeled him in closer and guided the ring back on his finger, enunciating with eyes steadily boring into his own, “You know as well as I that the Green Lantern Corps is on its way. Every member of the Sinestro Corps will be needed to repel them. Do your duty, Lantern Jordan, or see my patience for your chronic rebellion come to an end.”

“Still being ‘considerate’?” Hal groused as Sinestro let their hands drop. His thumb unconsciously went to rub against the rim of the ring.

“Consider it sentimental hopes that an old friend will not betray for the second time,” the other muttered as he exited the room, no doubt to prepare for the upcoming battle.

Taking once last look at the metal wrapped around his finger, Hal joined him.

From the number of Corpsmen gathered by the time a disturbance from the dimensional wall was detected, he guessed that that day’s mission had been one of recruitment. Armored sludge, a giant centipede, a robed figure with wicked-looking spines protruding from its back –those were only a few that he saw. Some were humanoid but most looked monstrous, the stuff of nightmares. One of the rookies even eyed him with a suggestive lick of its forked tongue against a bloodstained multitude of teeth. When Sinestro wasn’t looking, Hal conjured up blades at its every weak point and gave it a warning look. It and several others seemed to get the message.

The plan was simple: attack full force, since a simple scan with power rings would render any ambush pointless and none of the shields against it would be effective against so many at such a close range. Each member had a hit list uploaded onto their rings of Lanterns they were to kill if the opportunity presented itself; otherwise they were to rip through as many lower ranking Green Lanterns as possible. Only skilled Corpsmen were to actively seek the targets. And while they were to do so indiscriminately, Hal could see the gears turning as they picked who they would target.

A few moderately strong Lanterns were assigned to stay close to him. Though no reason was given, he knew it was two-prong: to make sure he behaved and to protect him from the countless GLs who, in all likelihood, would be aiming to sever his head. Given his reputation in the Sinestro Corps, he

was probably in as much danger from his would-be bodyguards as from anyone from his former Corps.

Fziz.

The air crackled and then the forerunners were in. The Lost Lanterns and Guy were the first to appear, acting almost as if they were in competition with one another, followed up by the Alpha Corps and what could only be the rest of the 7,200 officers. The Guardians, of course, were nowhere to be seen.

Both sides tore into one another till Hal could barely see, the space around him so full of bodies and blinding light. He half-heartedly joined in, all the while searching the mass of twisting forms for friends-turned-enemies. At one point he caught a glimpse of Uainel commanding a squad of constructs against a rampaging one-armed creature with a mane of feathers. Their eyes met, and she gave the same sharp nod as before, though this time it was tinged with resignation.

It was at that point a large shape slammed into him from above and rocketed them to the ground, a hastily erected shield the only protection against forceful collision. Rolling to his feet against the side of the crater that was created by their landing, a punch to his jaw made Hal lose his footing almost as soon as he got it. Even without catching a good look at his attacker, he knew that punch.

Before he could recover he was lifted by his shoulders and charged into the nearest wall. Pinned, he got a faceful of Guy Gardner, screaming, "What the fuck is wrong with you?!"

"Hey, Guy." Knocking his former teammate away with a quick blast, Hal sprang forward with a large fist, sending Guy flying back into the crater just in time to avoid a kill shot from one of his guards. "I'll handle this one myself!" he called over to her, a humanoid with spider-like arms growing from her back, "Find your own fight!" She sneered gruesomely but obeyed.

"Just you and me, Jordo?" Guy was on his feet again, brushing grit off his face. Hal didn't like the analytical frown on his face, the one that reminded him just how smart he really was. He was on tenuous standing with the Sinestro Corps as it was; the last thing he needed was for Guy to call his bluff.

"I'll save the sidekick for an actual threat," he taunted. No good; instead of rushing in, fists flying, Guy gave him an odd look. At a loss for something, anything else to use as distraction, he threw a boxing glove at his head.

Just like that, they were exchanging blows. The last time they'd fought like that, Guy had been in a much less steady frame of mind. Now their roles were reversed: it was Hal who was agitated and Guy the one keeping his cool.

Catching Hal's gut with his fist, Guy took the opportunity to lean in and whisper, "There a reason why ya saved me?"

Hal could only sputter and choke.

"Cuz ya know what I think? I think yer not a yellow at all." That same expression from earlier replaced Guy's battle snarl as he took the opportunity to wind tendrils of light around Hal's body to effectively bind him. "The new kid was all doom and gloom that you were 'sinking into the inescapable depths of your new role' or some crap like that." He took on an obnoxious falsetto as he air-quoted her words. "Natu was pretty pissy about the whole thing too. But ya saved Kyle too, didn't you?"

“Guy,” Hal finally managed to gasp out through his windedness, “Look, *I can’t be a Green Lantern*. I don’t want to fight you guys but as long as I’m with the Sinestro Corps-“

“Christ, Hal, do you hear yourself or do I need ta knock the wax outta yer ears?” Guy took a moment to casually swat a rookie out of the air who was trying to set up the perfect shot between his eyes. “After everything he’s done, ya pick *Sinestro* over the Corps?”

“No! I pick Sinestro over the *Guardians*!”

“The hell does that even mean?” he scoffed.

Behind him Hal could see Kyle working double-time to keep both yellow and green forms away from them. No wonder they had been able to talk so long uninterrupted; the two must have arranged it to get another chance to talk to him. Which could only mean one thing.

He still had their trust.

It was a trust that led Kyle to risk the fate of the Corps and, as he was now doing, shed blood for. Hal couldn’t waste it, and, for the first time since accepting the yellow ring, he felt hope that just maybe all could be righted.

“Guy, listen,” he said as earnestly as possible, “You remember what happened the last time I was with the Guardians?”

Guy cocked an eyebrow. “I was there, Jordo, where’re you goin’ with this?”

“You can’t tell me you don’t see where this is going.” When that gained no response, Hal huffily clarified, “They created internal affairs officers with almost complete free reign! They wanted to discipline me for talking to another Corps! The Guardians are acting like tyrants!”

“So you go over to the real tyrant instead. That makes perfect sense.” Guy remained as frustratingly unreadable as ever –never before had it so clearly hit home how completely lacking in fear the man was.

Hal was, admittedly, getting desperate. How could the others not see what he was seeing? Were they in denial? Or were Uainel and Soranik right, and the power of fear was twisting his world view?

“They were ready to arrest me just for *disagreeing* with them,” he tried, almost begging for Guy to get what he was saying.

To his relief, Guy nodded. “Ya know what? Ya got a point. I mean, they did ban sex while you were gone.”

Laughing, Hal remarked, “Yeah, I bet they *would* do that.” For a long moment, Guy just looked at him. “Wait, they didn’t actually –I mean, they wouldn’t really-“

Guy brushed off his gaping with a manic grin, “Gotcha. The only cooties they’re worried about are the kind that goes on between Green Lanterns.” He wrinkled his nose and seemed to just then remember that Hal didn’t need to be tied up any longer. Or maybe he’d just liked to see Hal squirm. “Still, made for the biggest mass ditchin’ of the Corps in history. Recruits have become somethin’ of a commodity lately.”

Rubbing the circulation back into his wrists, Hal’s first action upon tasting freedom was to deck Guy in the jaw. “Sorry, got to keep up appearances,” he apologized, crushing down the part of him happy to get back someone who’d tied him up, “Sinestro’s got me on a short leash right now. Hopefully I can erase this conversation from the ring’s record before he listens in on it.”

Guy just smirked. “Hey, whatever. Looks like it was time for your exit anyway.” He nodded towards a group of beleaguered Sinestro Corpsmen starting to dissolve into a retreat from the numerically superior force assaulting them.

Glancing around quickly, he noticed their formations had been reduced to disconnected pockets where the weak and unlucky had fallen. Sinestro was laboring to organize a retreat, but many of the rookies who had survived were too caught up in their bloodlust to stop fighting and were tripping up those who tried to follow the order.

“Hey, Jordan, before ya go –I’ll look into it, okay? Get a few of the others in on it too,” Guy promised.

He fired scattered beams at Hal, who zoomed away through the rest of the battlefield, knocking back Lanterns of both colors to clear a way for the routed members of the Sinestro Corps to get away from the opponents trying to forcefully reengage them in the battle. Upon reaching the force Sinestro had managed to gather together, they unzipped their molecules and escaped to a back-up base in Sector 1417.

A quick inventory revealed the Sinestro Corps, already struggling to recover from when the Guardians had unveiled the first law, now had more than half of their number dead or MIA. Quite a few others were wounded to varying degrees. Sinestro’s frown deepened ever-so-slightly –Hal recognized it as the look he got when he miscalculated. Hal was ready to kick himself too, and he didn’t feel any particular stirrings of obligation toward the Sinestro Corps; he and Sinestro both had expected something more like when he, John, Guy, and the Lost Lanterns had gone to retrieve Kyle and Ion, maybe a few dozen Lanterns at most. Instead the Guardians left the entire universe undefended just to wipe them out. A sick, worried feeling wormed its way through him.

Maybe Sinestro noticed –or maybe he’d intended the whole time to speak to him again –because he turned his attention to Hal. The look he gave was brief, the kind that only someone who knew him well would recognize for the summons that it was. After all the necessary duties had been attended to –such as setting up a device to scramble any attempts from Oa to track them –they retired to their newly-claimed room for round three of Give Hal a Talking-To.

“I didn’t fight like I could’ve,” Hal started preemptively, “I didn’t act in the interests of the Corps, my loyalties are conflicted. Tell me something I don’t already know.” He held his index finger extended towards the Korugarian’s face. “But you broke your promise too. You said I’d never have to fight against the Green Lantern Corps.” The two glared each other down.

“Is this some game to you, Jordan?” Sinestro growled, leaning slightly forward as Hal lowered his hand. Had he been less angry himself, the movement would have surprised him in its undisguised aggression. “You act against the Green Lanterns Corps, yet you refuse to abide by my own. You share my bed and still you deny my mission! It’s time for the pretenses to fall, Hal Jordan; why have you chosen fear?”

“Because the Guardians–“

“So you have repeatedly said!” His tone had grown more intense until it at last hit a crescendo of unbridled passion. “Your words notwithstanding, you have made no effort against the Guardians, nor have you directed your talents in a way befitting a Lantern of any Corps! You may as well have returned to that primitive ball of mud for all that you have accomplished!” The last bit was shouted directly into Hal’s face.

“You know what? You’re right! I’ll get back there *right now*.” Hal wheeled around him, muttering viciously as he stomped for the door, “I don’t know why I even joined.”

He was halted by a hand on his shoulder. “What was that?” While far from regaining his cool, Sinestro had at least stopped yelling.

For a moment Hal was undecided whether he should answer or not—a short moment, as he made it a point never to back down, and anyways, what did it matter?

Turning back around, he snapped, “I don’t want anything to do with mass-murdering psychopaths like the Sinestro Corps.”

“That makes your decision even more incomprehensible,” Sinestro commented sharply.

Hal ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “I don’t know why I’m here, okay? I jumped in without thinking and I’ve been wondering since I got here why I did it.”

“Then—without a moment’s thought, in typical Hal Jordan brashness—you came to my side?” There was something like wonder in Sinestro’s voice.

When put that way, it sounded like it meant more than it did. “Well, yeah, but—“

A pair of lips cut him off brusquely mid-sentence. He was almost annoyed at the frequency he’d been interrupted that day, but then Sinestro ran his hands down his back, digging his nails in just a bit, and what he had been about to say was the last thing on his mind.

“It can’t be time to get up yet,” Hal groaned, shifting under the covers. Beside him, Sinestro had remained in bed until he awoke for the third day since their heart-to-heart. That was three days in which they actually met up for meals, took breaks together, and, most importantly, spoke. He’d never thought he would have pillow talk of all things with his greatest enemy.

“There’s work to be done,” Sinestro chided, drawing back his section of the covers.

Hal responded by looping his arms around the other’s waist and dragging him deeper into the sheets. He noticed with a smirk that he got no resistance. “Who wants to work?”

Sinestro humored him for a moment longer with the shadow of a smile. Then it was to breakfast for the both of them, each shuffling about their respective routine. What in his previous relationships had been stifling domesticity, Hal found came naturally, now that he and Sinestro had, for the most part, resolved their issues.

“I expect you will be resuming your work on Ryshka, Jordan?”

“Yeah,” he nodded, buttering his toast, “Place got hit pretty hard this monsoon season. You know,” he said, wagging an eyebrow at his lover, “you *can* call me ‘Hal’.”

A real smile, small as it was, appeared. “Ah, but that would throw off years of convention, wouldn’t it?” That constituted a joke from Sinestro. At these times, when it was just them, it was almost as if he was a different person. Or rather, the same person, only younger and more hopeful. Hal was beginning to suspect this was who Sinestro was before his drive for order became too strong.

It was the person he was trying to get in charge of the Sinestro Corps.

“Maybe a little change is just what you need.” He said it teasingly, but made eye contact to convey that it was only half so.

“Oh? What are you suggesting?” Dammit if he didn’t just return the eyebrow waggle. Deep down inside Hal knew that their relationship was getting schmaltzy, but he couldn’t help but feel giddy. Personally, he blamed it on his inner rookie.

Doing so gave him an idea. “How about just this once, you tag along on one of my missions? Let the others have a day off or something.”

Sinestro snorted. “Yes, then we can all be as unproductive as you.”

“What, are you afraid you’ll actually like it?” Hal goaded, grinning a challenge at a weakening Sinestro.

The Korugarian rolled his eyes in return. “I’m sure I will enjoy it as much as I did all those years ago.”

“I’m not the rookie I once was. You’ve never really flown with me before,” he hinted with his trademark charmingly crooked smile.

“Your pick-up lines are unimpressive, Jordan, and so are you.” Nevertheless, Sinestro gave the announcement to a bemused Corps and they soared off together, first rebuilding on one planet, then catching a criminal on another.

Hal wasn’t sure exactly how much Sinestro was enjoying himself, but the work did seem to leave him gratified. That, or it was the way Hal got a little frisky on the way home. Either way, they were both caught off-guard when a series of hard light beams struck them from all directions upon touching back down on the planet.

Screaming in shock and pain, the two recovered and automatically moved to be back-to-back. Hal didn’t need to bother scanning with his ring; the acrid scent of cowardice would have given the attackers away, even if the sickly sweet taste the average Sinestro Corpsman exuded hadn’t.

“What is the meaning of this?” Sinestro demanded acidly. He too was taking on that taste, transitioning from a sweet sherry to something that made Hal want to gag.

Six Corpsmen flung themselves out of the shadows, throwing a net around the duo. Hal was about to shatter it –really, *he* could accomplish more with the ring and he was a former Green Lantern! –when he felt brush of Sinestro’s hand against his elbow. *Stay*, it said, so he let them approach. None were ones he recognized. Whoever was behind the attack (it had to be someone else, since most of the Corps weren’t disciplined enough to band together on their own) didn’t want to risk the big guns, instead sending cannon fodder to wear them down.

“I will allow you one more chance to explain: what is the meaning of this?” Sinestro repeated more sternly.

“Mongul was right! You have gone soft!” one crowed, circling predatorily. He stopped in front of Hal. “And we can thank our little Earthman here for showing your true colors.”

“So, how many do you think Mongul has on his side?” Hal asked, blithely ignoring the malicious figure.

Sinestro replied in a deadpan tone, “Clearly enough that he feels he has some to spare. That would suggest the Corps in its entirety.”

“Mind if I take him down? I owe him one for messing around with Black Mercy.”

“See that you do. I have a Corps to retake. They have shown a disgusting lack of self-control in my absence.”

“You know, I could say ‘I told you so’.”

“Just toss about your boxing gloves.” Sinestro casually struck their captors away, breaking their concentration and freeing the two of them. Making to end the lives of the mutineers, he begrudgingly amended his action to simply removing their rings and locking them inside a nearby building at Hal’s insistence.

Hal, meanwhile, stood on look-out, a job that quickly paid off. “Incoming,” he warned Sinestro –ten, eleven, twelve, and more were arriving in clumps. Apparently Mongul had decided their deaths were worth throwing away a squadron or two. The newcomers were of much higher rank as well; Mongul was playing for keeps. While it was possible that they could be beaten if Hal and Sinestro worked together-

“Fighting here would be pointless; the only outcome is that we eventually become overwhelmed with their numbers,” Sinestro muttered so that only Hal could hear, “And my failsafe was intended to be used against individual insurgents from a close range.”

“Would it help if I covered you?” Hal murmured back, eyes darting back and forth as he calculated their odds. He gave up counting around the three dozen mark.

“Even you can see we are outmatched, dependent on numbers as our opponents may be. We retreat,” decided Sinestro. He cast a measured glance at Hal until he agreed with the plan and got into position –Sinestro at point, him carrying up the rear.

And they were off.

The Corpsmen hadn’t foreseen the charge, and the early arrivals were thus bowled over. Quickly recovering, they cast a myriad of macabre constructs that were all, with difficulty, clouded by Hal. On Sinestro’s end there were many more that hadn’t been ambushed taking a fresh initiative. Neither of the men could be everywhere at once, and more than a few shots got through even their shields. Hal, in his eagerness to put up an offense that could defend them, was the first to go down, missing an attack coming in from his left. Sinestro’s then-undefended back was pummeled with several attacks at once.

Just like that they were separated.

Just like that they were overwhelmed.

Sha-KOOM!

Brilliant emerald energy lanced down from the heavens and scattered the Sinestro Corpsmen. They made an effort to regroup but were thwarted by the efforts of Hal, Sinestro, and their mystery saviors. Off balance and howling, the hostiles were easily escaped that time.

Safe on the largest of the orbiting moons, Hal took stock of who had come to their rescue, doubtless following the directions he’d sent Guy via ring. There was John, stoic and loyal as always; Kyle, who shot him a rather relieved smile; Soranik, studiously ignoring Sinestro and instead observing Hal’s injuries, deeming them minor; Arisia, shaking her head amusedly at the trouble he’d managed to get into; Kilowog, keeping a watchful eye on Sinestro; Uainel, standing apart from the others and giving him that hard stare of hers; and finally Guy, who as he approached looked more irritated than Hal had seen him since becoming a Green Lantern again.

“You were right about the smurfs, Jordo –the new laws’re as fascist as it gets,” Guy reported heatedly, grumbling in an undertone, “I’ll question whoever the hell I want, ya chuckleheads.”

“So what’s the plan?” asked Hal, looking from one to another.

“Well it *was* ‘spread the news to all the GLs’ so we could get answers as a group,” began Kilowog.

“Strength in numbers, then?”

“But Guy thought we should come talk to you first. Looks like it was a good call,” he continued, “Also looks like our priorities might’ve changed some.”

Uainel spoke next, crisp, professional, and cold, “We went first to the most settled area of this planet, and discovered only the enemy. The one named Mongul expressed plans for the destruction of the Green Lantern Corps.” She focused her gaze on Sinestro, and the two dueled with their eyes. “I take it this was not your doing.”

“As if he won’t gladly take advantage of it!” Soranik fumed.

“Sora, I don’t like it either, but it looks like for now we’re just going to have to live with it,” Kyle coaxed, “We can trust Hal at least.”

“We’ll see about that.” She eyed his uniform distrustfully. He couldn’t blame her; after what Sinestro did to Korugar and the way Hal had spoken when last they saw each other –which, after hearing it played back, admittedly sounded insane –he was surprised she’d agreed to help at all.

“It makes no difference whether you choose to have faith in me or not,” Sinestro remarked less sneeringly than Hal had expected, “Once I have challenged Mongul and defeated him in front of my Corps, the rest shall fall in line.”

“And what, you’re just going to charge in there, guns blazing?” Hal cut in before someone else could, “Even if you challenge Mongul, it doesn’t mean he’ll accept. For all you know he’ll throw the entire Corps at you instead!”

“Jordan, are you suggesting I make a plan in advance?” Sinestro’s eyebrow hiked up his forehead.

He frowned in annoyance at the jab and crossed his arms. “You know what? I am.”

“Truly a moment deserving its own chapter in the Book of Parallax.” There was that almost-smile again. He was beginning to think he wasn’t the only one who enjoyed pushing buttons in this relationship.

Well, it was time to push another. “The plan is we accept everyone’s help.”

They stared each other off, Hal stubbornly bull-headed and Sinestro unyieldingly prideful. Back and forth their eyes said *‘You give in’, ‘No, you’*. Hal knew he had the upper hand though; Sinestro knew what they were all saying made sense. He just didn’t want to admit it. At last that subtle look came over his face that said he was ready to listen to reason.

“Fine then, if only to stop your pouting,” he huffed.

“I’m not pouting!”

“If you boys are done flirting, we have a Corps to dismantle,” Arisia said with a hint of exasperated teasing.

The two yellows shut up.

John raised an eyebrow at that but didn't comment, unlike Guy who mumbled something in the back that Hal was rather happy to miss. "...In any case, our best bet is to use guerilla tactics. They know we're here now, but they won't be expecting us so soon."

"And since the only anti-GL power that's been set up is the scan dampener, we won't have anything to worry about besides their rings," Hal expository.

"We should separate into groups," John suggested, "Then, from there, we can decide who does what."

Soranik, Kyle, and Guy were together almost before John had finished talking. Hal could understand Kyle and Guy splitting off, but he hadn't thought they knew Soranik that well yet. Upon closer observation he had to smirk. And people said he was obvious.

Arisia and Kilowog naturally paired off, and John joined them to keep the number of Earth Lanterns in each group balanced. That left Sinestro, Uainel, and himself. He could already feel the tension between the two shockingly similar individuals.

A hand on his shoulder called his attention to Arisia, who had moved to be standing beside him. "You know, for a while I thought it was like before."

"You mean when I was Parallax?" Hal looked down at his Qwardian ring, not for the first time, with guilt. For a moment neither of them said anything.

Then Arisia spoke up almost hesitantly. "Hal, I was joking back there when I said you two were flirting, but I have to know: is it true?"

"Is what true?" At least since it was Arisia asking the questions, he might avoid most of the drama than if, say, Soranik had thought to examine their interaction more closely. Even so, Hal had hoped to avoid ever talking about it.

"We were lovers, Hal, I know what you look like when you're in a relationship," she pointed out, "I'm only asking so I know what you've gotten yourself into this time."

"I'm a big boy, Arisia. I can take care of myself." He smiled confidently to bolster his point.

"Not when it comes to relationships, you can't," she laughed. Sobering up, she said with complete seriousness, "Sinestro seems different, but he has a history with showing his true colors. Just watch yourself, okay?" She nudged him with her elbow and walked back to where John and Kilowog were deciding how to move forward.

Hal didn't have her blessing, but then she hadn't tried to stage an intervention either. With Sinestro as his lover, he was lucky to get even that.

An intervention was starting to sound good to Hal. He, Sinestro, and Uainel were to deal with Mongul while John's group sabotaged the scan dampener. Once the base was detectable to the Green Lantern Corps, all of them could flee and let the Corps capture the Sinestro Corps without ever knowing they were involved. Both had to wait on the cue from Guy's group, who were on distraction. That meant that Hal had been stuck waiting in position with Sinestro and Fem-estro for the past ten minutes as they had the universe's longest glare-off. He wasn't sure what made Sinestro

resent Uainel more than the others, or why Uainel seemed to take personal offense at his very existence, but he was getting worried that something might happen that the Sinestro Corps couldn't help but notice.

Fortunately for him, Guy went out of his way to make the distraction conspicuous. He recognized quite a bit of Kyle's handiwork as well, though he didn't know Soranik's style well enough to pick it apart from the others, especially at the distance he was at from it.

"We move," Uainel whispered confrontationally in Sinestro's direction. While not taking the bait, he looked ready to murder her.

Predictably, a large portion of the Sinestro Corps was drawn away by the fireworks the others were creating. Still others hung back, most likely guessing it was a decoy, to stand guard at various strategic points around the base. There was no opening wide enough for even a rat to sneak through without being caught.

Unless, of course, one counted the tunnel leading into and out of his quarters that Sinestro had kept secret from the rest of the Corps, complete with its own ring dampener on a separate system.

Their entrance, combined with the preoccupation of the enemy forces, meant that not only did they arrive at the war room where Mongul was without encountering a single Corpsman, but he was virtually alone.

"I've been waiting for some token challenge," Sinestro announced as he floated grandly down to where Mongul stood.

While Sinestro put on his performance, Hal and Uainel stood as bodyguards to keep back any of the other Corpsmen who thought to join in. There were five of them –if he had his old ring, he could take them all on. However, he had less faith in his abilities with the Qwardian ring and Uainel was barely out of boot camp. And their potential opponents noticed.

A worm-looking creature made the first move, flippantly sashaying in Uainel's direction. It had to make a quick dodge as her inexperience was compensated for by her quick hand. Now that the first shot had been fired it was a free-for-all, constructs striking out wildly in the melee. Engage. Disengage. Circle around, aim for a blind spot, line them up to be knocked down.

Fzzit!

"Watch it!" he called to Uainel, who'd fired upon him by mistake. He noticed that she was less restrained than she'd been during the attack on Qward. It called to mind a strange thing she'd said when they first met, and, working off a growing hunch, he checked his ring's database on Triskians. Apparently their eyes didn't distinguish between green and yellow.

He made sure to stay farther back from her after that.

Somehow, amongst the crazed struggle and occasional friendly fire, Hal managed to fell his first adversary. Ready to end it, he remembered just in time that he was trying to nudge Sinestro to take the high road. That hesitation would've given it the chance to recover, but it paused in alarm at a view over Hal's shoulder.

"That was fast," Hal commented.

"I told you before: individual insurgents at a close range." Sinestro's smirk was even more smugly self-satisfied than usual.

"I guess that's it then," he mused. The other snorted but made no comment and the third member of their party silently held up the shuddering body of her opponent as a warning to the other Corpsmen to come quietly. Forget the Green Lantern Corps, he was surprised she'd never been tapped for the Sinestro Corps. His disapproval must have shown, for she cast him that haughty look of self-assuredness that seemed to be her default.

Their objective achieved, they flew to the exit of the headquarters and rejoined the other two groups, who were waiting on the moon for them after losing their pursuers.

"'Bout time you guys got out here, we've been waitin' fer ages!" Guy grouched as Hal moved to the center of the gaggle.

"How soon do you think the Corps will arrive?" he asked, "Unless they've been scanning constantly since we escaped, it might be awhile before they notice. The Sinestro Corps won't chase their tails forever."

"They have no need to, Hal Jordan."

They all knew that voice. Turning, they saw the Guardian hovering, looking on in condemnation. A number of Green Lanterns spread out from behind him to surround the small group while others glided down to the planet to claim their captives. Even split up there were too many Lanterns to resist without risking casualties. Guy and the rest all had the same expression as the group figured out what had happened.

They'd been followed.

Hal stared at the opposite wall of his sciencell and sighed. He was sentenced to death for treason, as were the others if and when they were caught. His ring had been taken away and even he knew better than to get into a fistfight with the people he was trying to convince he wasn't evil. For once in his life, he had no clue what would become of him.

A shadow fell across the floor. At first he thought it was more of the same, Lanterns coming to berate him for his betrayal or gawk at the once-greatest Green Lantern, but instead the door dissolved and two Alphas strode in. Apparently the Guardians were eager to get rid of him once and for all.

He was escorted to an open, stage-like area that the Corps was gathered around. Once there, he was made to stand, restrained, facing the ones he left for the Sinestro Corps. It reminded him of the first time the Corps tried to execute Sinestro, only for him there would be no escape clause.

Sinestro. Somewhere along the way he'd gotten used to the idea of being with him forever. The days directly after the attack on Qward had made him think that maybe both of them could get out of the vicious cycle they seemed to be trapped in and finally manage to do what was right. Now, with Sinestro on the run and himself about to die, he just hoped that Guy and everyone else he'd brought into his investigation was enough to bring the Corps back to what it was. Being forced to rely on his friends and on death row... he'd never felt so defeated. It was like everything that happened up to that point had caught up to him at the worst possible time.

Disinterestedly, Hal noted that his charges were being read. Fraternizing with another Corps, speaking out against the Guardians, speaking against the Book of Oa, treason, and the conversion of Green Lanterns to the Sinestro Corps. The Lanterns in attendance uneasily chattered amongst themselves at the mention of the violated new laws, but quickly forgot to be worried when they were

reminded of his current Corps membership. He'd failed them too many times for them not to throw their support behind his execution.

To make matters worse, Boodikka was the Alpha chosen to do it. He barely heard the last thing she said to him but did notice that he was given no last words himself. Instead, all he could do was straighten up, square his shoulders, and get ready to face death head on.

Because Hal may have joined the Sinestro Corps.

May have fought against friends.

Disregarded Corps principles.

Used fear.

But through it all, he'd never been anything other than a Green Lantern, no matter what color he wore. And if Hal Jordan had to die, it was going to be as one, *no matter what color he wore*.

Boodikka raised her ring hand, and he met her eyes, and she fired-

And the shot was ricocheted from a bowl-shaped construct.

"Throwin' a party and ya didn't invite me?"

Guy Gardner had saved his life.

Guy Gardner. Had saved him.

Kilowog, John, Arisia, Kyle, Soranik –all respected Green Lanterns, all wanted fugitives.

All there to defend him.

"Listen up, ya poozers!" Kilowog bellowed. When he took that tone, everyone was a rookie again. No one spoke, unless the Guardians' angered sputtering and Alpha Lanterns' robotic protests in the background counted. Every eye in the room was on Kilowog. "Before we go executing anyone, how 'bout we hold an actual trial?"

"We have reason to believe that the Guardians are abusing their power," John continued, his voice carrying powerfully, "I'm sure that by now everyone knows the new laws?"

"This disruption will not be tolerated! Hand over your rings at once!" the nearest Guardian decried.

"See? That right there, people –we really gonna let that stand?" Guy mouthed off.

"The Guardians are doing more than just keeping order –they're telling us what we can say and think!" Arisia seamlessly followed up.

"Who we can know," said Guy seriously.

"Who we can love." Kyle gestured emphatically as he spoke, "Who does that remind you of?"

Soranik stepped and stated grimly, "Korugar could answer that for you. The Green Lantern Corps is working to this day to repair our trust after Sinestro." Muttering had sprung up again. The Lanterns were listening.

"Hal left," started John, easily commanding their attention, "because he experienced firsthand what

was happening and didn't know what to do about it. It was easier to find a more black and white situation, one that he could change for the better, than to address what was going on at home."

"But Green Lanterns can't take the easy way!" Kilowog roared, "It's our Corps, so shape up and start taking responsibility!"

"The Sinestro Corps is no longer a threat! Other Corps may be hostile or may not be, but one thing is clear: the policy on dealing with them needs to be more flexible." While they weren't wild on Arisia's point, now that the Lanterns were open to listening they had to accede to it.

The Guardians, however, were not. "If the fugitives are done, we have a traitor to deal with. *Several* traitors," the spokesman clarified, flicking his eyes to said fugitives.

"Listen, sweetheart, there's not a man here who betrayed the Green Lantern Corps! Everything we've done's been in service of the Corps!" Guy shouted, his ring spitting up sparks and entire body tense with aggression.

"You are guilty of violating the new laws and--"

"Save it, Smurf--"

"Such insolence--"

One of the rookies piped up, "Y-you're scared to let him talk!"

The Guardian turned on the speaker, who appeared to have been chosen rather young. "You dare accuse me of having an emotional response?"

Guy moved in between the two. "What, that against the law now too?"

"Move, Gardner, or your sentence will continue to increase in severity!" The Guardian's hands glowed with energy ready to be released.

Guy handled it the way he handled everything, with a fist to the face. "Ooh, I'm quakin'," he sneered sarcastically amidst the outcry from the Guardians and Alphas. One Alpha made to return the strike, and then it was on.

More and more Lanterns got sucked into the fight, and it was with relief that Hal noticed that most were on their side. Free to move again now that the focus on his restraints had dwindled, he made a flying leap onto the nearest Alpha and punched it on whatever surface he could find that wasn't protected by machine until he was tossed off.

He was prepared for a rough impact, but instead Sinestro caught him. "So joining my Corps was about changing it?"

"I didn't really think that far ahead." He shrugged carelessly.

"I would say that was clear just from what you tried on that Alpha Lantern." Sinestro slipped a new Qwardian ring onto his finger but kept his grip. "The Green Lanterns can't directly harm the Guardians. If they are to be taken down, we must employ more extreme measures." He let go once he knew Hal wasn't going to immediately fly off.

"What did you have in mind?" Hal couldn't think of more than a few forces more powerful than the Guardians. The Spectre, arguably the Anti-Monitor, Ion.... "Wait, you don't mean Parallax?"

Sinestro smiled, really smiled, gently, perhaps because he felt the stab of fear run through Hal. “If I merge with Parallax we’ll have the power to defeat the Guardians.”

“Sinestro, you don’t know what it’s like being in there with it.” He tried to think of a way to describe the experience and failed. He did come up with a plan though. “Let me be Parallax. I’ve been through it before, and with you there, you can help me control it.” A thought came to mind and he cracked a smile. “You can be my lightning rod.”

Sinestro didn’t get the reference, but he didn’t need to in order to grasp the logic. “I take it then you know where it’s been hidden away?”

“Yeah,” Hal confirmed, sending a tendril of yellow energy out and calling the other three Earth Lanterns through his ring, “We trapped it in the batteries.” Each of the others looked at him in doubt of his judgment, but still entrusted the vital pieces to him. “Ready?”

Sinestro nodded and, with his superior control over fear, led Parallax out of the battery.

My precious Hal.

“I guess I don’t have to ask if you’re ready for round two,” he quipped, grasping the creature’s form. Right before the meld, he made sure to catch Sinestro’s eye and give him a reassuring smile. The other scoffed, but Hal could feel the fear simmering below the surface.

Someone’s been busy. You must have missed having me inside you.

“Cuh-careful, Parallax, Sinestro’s a pretty jealous man.” Right now he was more confused than jealous, but Hal could see him ripping Parallax to shreds over a comment like that. His knight in shining white armor. Right.

Playing with a little yellow ring hasn’t given you mastery over me, Hal Jordan. In the end you’ll lie back, as you did before.

“Hey, Parallax? Do me a favor and shut up for a bit,” Hal growled, brushing his newly appeared cape out of the way. Apparently Parallax preferred him in green.

You are the one who was called the greatest of the Green Lanterns. One so full of willpower only belongs in one color, as delectable as your dabbling with my power may be.

“Jordan? Hal?” Sinestro wasn’t sure what to do.

“Yeah, it’s me, I’m **in control**.” Parallax showed off rows of razor-sharp teeth to Sinestro in a sick grin. “**If I were to kill you now, my brave host would be overwhelmed with the most marvelous fear and anger and grief. It would be like when Coast City was destroyed.**” Its grin stretched wider. “**I remember how beautiful he was, consumed by despair and terror until only my voice could guide him from his blackest night.**”

“And now here you are again, at the citadel of they who trapped you.”

“Don’t think I haven’t already gleaned your plan from Hal Jordan’s mind, Sinestro –I am no more under your control than I am under Hal’s.” Except that Hal was just beneath the surface of Parallax’s mind. On his own he wouldn’t be able to wrest control back –not completely, and anyway, he didn’t want to try and fight the Guardians of the Universe at the same time –but he could influence it.

“I already have a greater revenge in mind than merely killing them. I shall let them destroy their own army first, and then the universe will- S-Sinestro,” Hal gasped, “This is taking too long. Where are the Guardians?”

Sinestro pointed to a ways beyond Hal, where the ground was green with defeated Lanterns. The Guardians were downing them with a single blow, often many at a time.

Without wasting a moment more, Hal shot across the open space between him and his targets, Parallax looking on in amused curiosity.

You yourself admit to not desiring to fight your old masters and me at the same time.

“Which is why I’m going to make you a wager,” he grunted in exertion.

Oh?

Hal lay out the rules. “You lend me your power, no strings attached.”

Sounds boring. You’re not very good at wagers, are you?

He plowed on. “When we win the day, I’ll be wanting my body back. But if I can’t force you out... you can keep it.”

He felt his face split in a giddy smile against his will.

You’re *such* a wonderful Green Lantern. Willing to give yourself up to me to save a few ingrates. I accept this titillating bargain.

And not a moment too soon. Hal came upon the Guardians, and the first to see him shrieked out a warning. Ignoring Parallax’s laughter echoing around his head, he smacked the closest one away from the Lantern she was worrying with a construct and set the heavily injured victim safely on the ground.

“Guardians, this is your last chance. I don’t want to hurt you,” he warned, tilting his head back to gaze at the circle they had formed above him.

Saying nothing, they unleashed their power on him as one.

“Ugh!” It hurt, more than anything he’d ever felt. But hurt was all it did. The Guardians were never a match for Parallax; that was why they locked it away back when they were stronger and had larger numbers. Hal got used to the pain, regained his concentration, and pushed back.

An energy burst of his own tossed them away like ragdolls. One by one, before they could even hit the ground, he caught and trapped them in a web of yellow. Struggle as they might, he had them in his grip. There was only one thing left to do.

Carefully, he siphoned their power back into the Central Battery, leaving them weakened. For all that they’d done, he hated to do it to them, but he had no choice if he didn’t want the same thing happening all over again as soon as he separated from Parallax.

“Hal?”

Kyle’s voice drifted from over his shoulder.

“Hal, is that you in there?”

“Yeah, it’s me.” His friends were beginning to crowd around. Not good. “You guys can handle it from here, right?”

“And just where do ya think yer goin’?” Guy demanded.

“Trust me. Please.” They came in closer. They weren’t listening. So he made the choice for them, gliding smoothly up and around to join Sinestro where he hovered. “There are a few loose ends that need to be tied up before I can visit. I promise I’ll be back.”

“By that do you mean as a Green Lantern or for a visit?” asked Arisia, mostly for the others’ benefit.

“We have plans to reform the Sinestro Corps,” Sinestro announced, glaring at Guy as he mouthed ‘we’, “Jordan will be in touch.” Turning to signify that, in his eyes at least, the conversation was over, he flew to a set of coordinates sent to Hal’s ring.

Hal shrugged, saying, “We’re still working on manners.” Then, with a wave goodbye, he was off as well.

That was brief for a final farewell. Maybe when I have your body the first thing I’ll do is pay them that visit.

“You talk too much.”

The destination was a barren moon of an equally desolate planet. A quick scan revealed only the most minimal of life forms in the planet’s general vicinity.

“Good place,” he called to the waiting Sinestro.

“Let’s just get it done,” he testily replied. In each hand was their batteries; these he placed on the ground between them. “How much control do you have, Jordan?”

Hal knew what he was really asking. “I’m going to need some help. Back when Kyle was Parallax, we were able to fight our way out when I showed him he wasn’t alone.”

His whining was getting tired anyway.

“Our power batteries will act as an anchor for Parallax,” Sinestro explained. He held out his hands and continued when Hal took them. “If all goes well... I shall be an anchor for you.”

If that’s your best plan I’ll be enjoying my freedom soon.

“For once we agree,” Hal commented.

“What? What did Parallax say?” Sinestro asked, alarm emanating off of him.

Hal winked. “He says to do your thing.” This time he was the one to yank Sinestro in, and took advantage of the close proximity of their mouths to kiss him deeply.

Sinestro was taken completely by surprise. As always, however, he recovered quickly and manipulated the batteries to accept just as Hal threw his effort into rejecting. Parallax’s voice was shrill with outrage, but it grew fainter and fainter until it couldn’t be heard at all. They’d done it.

It was a month or two (Hal really wasn’t sure, he’d been so busy) before he got the chance to meet

back up with the Green Lantern Corps, and then it was purely for the usual universe-saving. The last thing the Corps needed in such a critical stage of rebuilding was a zombie apocalypse, but that was the life. Apparently one of the Guardians was behind it. Fortunately, as they had been taken under wing by Ganthet and Sayd, it was a simple matter of reversing the process they'd used to restore her powers in the first place.

The Sinestro Corps –or, as Hal had all the recruits calling it, the Yellow Lantern Corps –was coming along nicely. This time around Sinestro avoided the sadists and murders –these were civilized fearmongers, more like a police force made up of Bats than its predecessor. It wasn't exactly like the Green Lantern Corps, but the two worked well enough together. In a way, the rivalry that formed between the two was like the sports teams of rival schools, only with more lasers and less bloodshed.

The same could, surprisingly, be said about Sinestro, Carol, and Cowgirl. Cowgirl was far from happy that she was being broken up with, but she and Hal were enough alike that she understood. She was okay enough with it to find a rebound, anyway. They still met up when they could to shoot the breeze and go for a (completely innocuous) flight.

Carol, on the other hand, explained to him exactly how stupid he was and then dragged Sinestro out the door. He never found out exactly what went on as they proceeded to be gone all day and well into the next morning, but the hangovers they were sporting gave him a pretty good guess. If there was a part of Hal that worried about what the two lovers he'd devoted the most of himself to were talking about, there was another that was just happy that Sinestro got along with at least one of the people from Hal's non-YLC life.

As for Sinestro, they'd been together for three years when Hal realized he'd settled down. Bringing it up with Sinestro got him a Cheshire cat smirk and a knowing chuckle. A topic to avoid then. Besides, he couldn't complain; settled-down life wasn't terrible, even if the more easygoing of the Yellow Lanterns teased the hell out of them every time they argued. It actually reminded him of his rookie days, only with more sex.

And really, what more could a guy want?

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